

September 18, 2006     Last week I spoke about simple steps Congress should take to address the problem of illegal immigration. Simple, however, does not mean easy. While the American people are demanding real immigration reform, many in Washington lack the political will to do what is required. That's why I've joined my colleagues in the House Immigration Reform caucus in demanding legislation this year that focuses on securing physical control of our borders while rejecting amnesty in any form. Congress has taken notice, and took an important first step last week by passing the Secure Fence Act of 2006-- legislation that provides physical security by lengthening border walls and creating a virtual border fence that extends thousands of miles. But many Senators, Representatives, and administration officials remain committed to pursuing amnesty in some form. The dictionary defines amnesty as a general pardon for offenders by a government, and most of the immigration reform proposals in both chambers of Congress certainly meet that definition. Millions of people who broke the law by entering, staying, and working in our country will not be punished, but rather rewarded with a visa and ultimately citizenship. This is amnesty, plain and simple. Lawbreakers are given legal status, while those seeking to immigrate legally face years of paperwork and long waits for a visa. What message does this send to the rest of the world? If we reward millions who came here illegally, surely millions more will follow suit. Ten years from now we will be in the same position, with a whole new generation of lawbreakers seeking amnesty. The immigration problem fundamentally is a welfare state problem. Some illegal immigrants-- certainly not all-- receive housing subsidies, food stamps, free medical care, and other forms of welfare. This alienates taxpayers and breeds suspicion of immigrants, even though the majority of them work very hard. Without a welfare state, we would know that everyone coming to America wanted to work hard and support himself. Since we have accepted a permanent welfare state, however, we cannot be surprised when some freeloaders and criminals are attracted to our shores. Welfare muddies the question of why immigrants want to come here. Illegal immigrants also threaten to place a tremendous strain on federal social entitlement programs. Successive administrations support so-called "totalization" agreements that allow millions of illegal immigrants to qualify for Social Security and other programs- programs that already threaten financial ruin for America in the coming decades. Adding millions of foreign citizens to the Social Security, Medicare, and disability rolls will only hasten the inevitable day of reckoning. Social Security is in serious trouble already, and sending benefits abroad to millions of illegal aliens who once worked here will cost hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars. Every American who hopes to collect Social Security someday should stridently oppose totalization and amnesty proposals. The problems associated with illegal immigration will not be solved overnight, but we cannot begin to address them until we take the hard steps of securing the borders, rejecting amnesty, and reclaiming our right as a sovereign nation to control immigration without apology.